



Maine Department of Conservation  
Natural Areas Program

*Clethra alnifolia* L.

Sweet Pepper-bush

**Habitat:** Swamps and moist woods. [Hardwood to mixed forest (forest, upland); Forested wetland]

**Range:** Florida to Texas, north to southern Maine and west to southeastern New York.

**Phenology:** Flowers July through August.

**Family:** Clethraceae

**Aids to Identification:** Showy racemes of fragrant white flowers with long, protruding styles are a prominent feature of this summer-blooming shrub. The smooth, almost shiny, alternate leaves are ovate, toothed above the middle, and have short petioles. The shrub grows 1-3 m tall, with frequent suckering at the base. It resembles heath plants (*Ericaceae*) in many respects. However, the presence of stellate hairs visible with a 10x hand lens serves to distinguish it from these plants.



Illustration from Britton & Brown's Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada, 2nd ed.

**Ecological characteristics:** Grows in swampy woods or thickets near ponds, may be locally abundant.

**Synonyms:**

**Rarity of *Clethra alnifolia***

<b>State Rank:</b>	S2	Imperiled in Maine because of rarity or vulnerability to further decline.
<b>New England Rank:</b>	None	
<b>Global Rank:</b>	G5	Demonstrably widespread, abundant, and secure globally.

**Status of *Clethra alnifolia***

<b>Federal Status:</b>	None	No Federal Status.
<b>State Status:</b>	Special Concern	
<b>Proposed State Status:</b>	Special Concern	Rare in Maine, based on available information, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered.

### Known Distribution in Maine:



- ▲ Historical (before 1983)
- Recent (1983 - present)

This rare plant has been documented from a total of 9 town(s) in the following county(ies): Hancock, Sagadahoc, York.

**Dates of documented observations are:** 1898 (2), 1916, 1917, 1936, 1958, 1983, 1985 (2), 1989 (2), 1990 (2), 1994, 1995, 1996 (2), 1997 (3), 1999 (2), 2000

### Reason(s) for rarity:

At northern end of range, not rare southward. Extensive development in southern Maine has eliminated much of the habitat of this species.

### Conservation considerations:

This plant is restricted statewide to southern Maine. Populations may be (or some may have been) vulnerable to conversion of their habitat to residential or commercial use, as many occur in small wetlands.

---

The information in this fact sheet was downloaded from the Natural Areas Program's Biological and Conservation Database on 29 APR 2004. We are grateful to our Botanical Advisory Group for additional information on particular species, and in particular, to Arthur Haines for his assistance with identifying characteristics and taxonomic questions. Nomenclature follows Haines and Vining's *Flora of Maine* (V.F. Thomas Press, 1998); where older works refer to a plant by another name, it is given under "Synonyms". The Natural Areas Program, within the Department of Conservation, maintains the most comprehensive source of information on Maine's rare or endangered plants and rare or exemplary natural communities, and is a member of the Association for Biodiversity Information.

If you know of locations for this plant or would like more information on this species,  
please contact the Natural Areas Program  
State House Station 93, Augusta, Maine 04333; telephone (207) 287-8044.

